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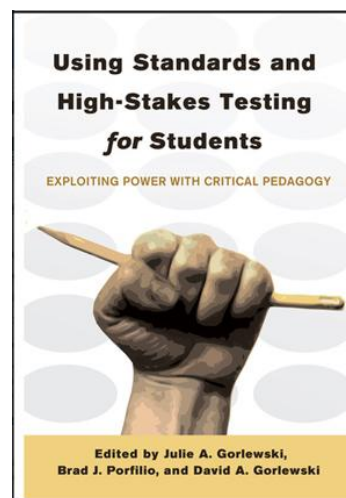
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Rarely do we encounter studies in the fields of educational evaluation, accountability, and testing that explicitly reference the dimensions of political and science philosophies, theoretical frameworks, and empirical data stemming from various research projects concerned with educational practices. This is nonetheless true of *Using Standards and High-stakes testing for Students*, in which Marxist, neo-Marxist, and social constructivist approaches are put into operation in conjunction with sociological and theoretical learning frameworks. According to the book, such approaches can be implemented to promote critical thinking and to



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demonstrate ways of overcoming and alleviating the immense negative consequences associated with high-stakes educational testing, noted as the narrowing of curriculum, teacher deprofessionalisation, and student alienation from schooling (e.g. p. 226).

The anthology includes contributions from researchers and practitioners whose work is related to the field of critical pedagogy. As such, the authors stand collectively in broad opposition to the hegemonic way of thinking within education policy and practice, which is based on a regime promoting standards and high-stakes testing practices rooted in a neoliberal mindset. One senses a tone in the book consisting of a synthesis between passion and scientific research qua the underlying political commitment and integrity of the individual authors.

A central – and sympathetic – aim of the book is ‘(...) to provide a deepened awareness of how educators can alleviate the negative effects of standardization, especially for students who populate poor and working-class communities’ (p. 3). Another core aim is to ‘(...) generate dissent-oriented projects that are capable of remaking the world and the ideals of love, justice, freedom, and equity – instead of reproducing the dominant values and relationships associated with the nearly 40-year neoliberal experiment’ (p. 3).

From a social scientific perspective, the book’s brilliance is how it seeks to identify and articulate strategies for working inside and under the auspices of the neoliberal framework that permeates the contemporary U.S. education sphere. It encourages creating latitude to allow for educational practices and transformative learning to be based on critical pedagogy, while continuing to fulfil the requirements of high-stakes tests and external standards installed by the neoliberal regime. In this respect, the book calls for strategies consistent with the theoretical framework extended by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their trilogy *Empire*, *Multitude*, and *Commonwealth*, although no explicit references are made to these works. As specified by the editors, however, the challenge ‘(...) is to construct and implement curricula and instructional activities that *exploit* the possibilities of standards (and their corollary assessments), while simultaneously fostering critical thinking and student efficacy’ (p. 3).

Even from a non-American perspective, the book retains significant relevance, because the current wave of standards, testing, and accountability knows no national borders (see e.g. Lawn & Grek 2012; Ydesen 2013). This wave is fostered by the neoliberal regime, with its widespread perception of states being locked in competition with each other. This creates fertile ground for international comparisons and standardization processes in education to take root, as well as an adherence to perceptions that education function as the provider of essential human resources for the competitive workforce of the future (Pedersen 2010).

The first chapter describes the anthology's organization, which is arranged in four parts. The first bears the title 'Standards, Schools, and Society' and treats the underlying social, economic, and political forces behind the movement towards standards and accountability. The second part, 'De-standardizing Teachers and Learning', provides strategies for educators to use in 'hijacking' the dominant discourses and practices of the movement to promote critical forms of pedagogy and curricula within K-12 schools (p. 3). Part Three, 'Leveraging Standards in Secondary Classrooms', documents how critical educators can act mindfully to employ instructional strategies, develop positive relationships with students, and generate transformative experiences, while concomitantly ensuring that students perform well on high-stakes examinations (p. 4). In the fourth and final part, 'Teacher Education: Modeling Critical Approaches', the editors highlight how critical educators can exploit corporate mandates to model emancipatory forms of teaching and learning (p. 4).

The second chapter, written by Joshua Garrison of the University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh, draws on the theoretical frameworks of Karl Marx, Michel Foucault, Jacques Rancière, Chantal Mouffe, and Slavoj Žižek. The main argument is standardized testing '(...) constitute[s] a form of alienation that breaks students' intellectual will and forces upon them a regimen of compulsory labor' (p. 13).

In making this argument, Garrison notes: 'The fruits of student testing labor are used for a variety of purposes that are external to the individual' (p. 19). The ramifications of

this separation between the individual's needs and those of the state are treated by the Danish theologian and philosopher K. E. Løgstrup, who points out: "If we let the value of a human life depend on its contribution to society, then contempt for the weak will guide the organization of our society, if it even stays at that" (Løgstrup 1993, p. 18 – my translation).

Chapter 3 is written by Ted Purinton of the American University in Cairo. He discusses progressive education and the deteriorating effects of New Public Management. His purpose is '(...) to identify a key strategy that progressive educators can use to assert their vision into the discussions about the future of public primary and secondary schooling' (p. 27f.). The chapter contains an interesting analysis drawing on progressive education's historical legacy. Purinton's main argument is that progressive educators must work directly within political systems to demonstrate the values of their philosophies, compromising wherever necessary to move education away from its present parochial and polarized state.

Chapter 4, written by P. L. Thomas of Furman University, South Carolina focuses on the collection of 'false prophets' presently populating the contemporary U.S. educational field, such as U.S. Minister of Education Arne Duncan, Microsoft CEO Bill Gates, education entrepreneur and activist Geoffrey Canada, and former Washington D.C. public school chancellor and education reformer Michelle Rhee. According to Thomas, the nature of such prophets' falseness is witnessed in their calls for change, even while they do nothing but offer the same responses to educational reform that have been implemented over the past three decades. In analysing the prophets' arguments, Thomas draws on critical analyses and historical perspectives to unmask the accountability discourse. The chapter concludes by offering three broad policy considerations that can enable students to engage with their social world.

In the fifth chapter, Victor H. Diaz of Arizona State University makes extensive use of the work of Paulo Freire to demonstrate how to teach *through* the test to raise critical consciousness and participation in a democratic society (p. 68). Diaz argues we must avoid seeing the goals of critical pedagogy and accountability policies as a

binary state. Instead, the relation should be viewed as ‘(...) a dialectic that offers hope and casts school success as a potent weapon in our student’s struggle for liberation’ (p. 82).

The second part of the anthology opens with Chapter 6. Written by Nicholas Daniel Hartlep of the University of Wisconsin and Antonio L. Ellis of Howard University in Washington, D.C., it uses critical race theory to throw light on the response-to-intervention (RTI) scheme associated with the 2001 U.S. No Child Left Behind Act. Their careful analysis of six consecutive years of state-level data allows the authors to demonstrate RTI’s failure to reduce the disproportionate representation of minorities in special education. The chapter concludes with four policy recommendations consistent with social justice objectives.

The seventh chapter, written by Andrea Hyde of Western Illinois University, draws the reader’s attention to the potential of the yoga-in-schools movement. The chapter illustrates the potential to exploit health crises discourses to spread a socially transformative agenda vis-à-vis official and ideological power. Using the theoretical framework of Paolo Freire, Hyde concludes this movement could function as a tool in the service of critical pedagogy and would empower students through identification of the oppressor within (p. 121).

Patricia Jacobs and Danling Fu of the University of Florida are the authors of Chapter 8, in which they present a case study of learning disabled students’ writing experiences in an inclusionary model classroom (p. 128). The authors demonstrate how two students were helped to cope with both the obstacles inherent in a high-pressure environment characterized by standards and test preparation and being classified as ‘learning disabled’. A focus on best-writing practices forms a central part of this coping strategy.

Chapter 9, written by Lindsey Russo of the State University of New York, pinpoints how the movement towards standards and accountability has had a deleterious effect on U.S. early childhood education because of its intensive focus on academic learning and school readiness. Referencing empirical studies, Russo argues that play

holds the potential to remedy some of these negative effects. One of the central conclusions is that ‘one-size-fits-all standards must be replaced with guidelines based upon a deep understanding of children’s cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development (p. 154).

The third section begins with Chapter 10. Written by Shawgi Tell of Nazareth College of Rochester, New York, it throws light on how a particular teacher of English as a Second Language manages to balance ‘the demands of high-stakes testing and accountability with a more genuine, holistic, critical, relevant, and meaningful approach’ in educating her students (p. 162). The foundation of this chapter’s arguments is that education should be perceived as a human right and as a basic need. This notion forms the critical backdrop to realizing that market notions linked to education effectively negate the right to an education. Tell offers a highly competent outline of the neoliberal agenda, as it relates to some of the critical challenges faced by contemporary U.S. public education.

Chapter 11, written by Rosemary A. Millham, again of the State University of New York, presents her work with experimental education and its ability to create transformative learning experiences and student empowerment. Millham draws on the work of both Henry Giroux and John Dewey in her showdown with ‘talk and chalk’ teaching. The chapter concludes that a pedagogy encouraging and supporting empowerment, critical thinking, and process skills will guide students to achieve excellence in the classroom.

Chapter 12, co-written by Katie Greene of Milton High School and Peggy Albers of Georgia State University, analyses the possibilities and impacts of teaching writing. They argue teachers must prepare students to develop literacy practices that allow them to engage with their worlds, and to examine and write about their assumptions concerned with learning. The chapter concludes with the idea that writing is a social process from which engagement, collaboration, and social change may emerge.

The thirteenth chapter is co-written by Kathy Garland of Georgia State University and high school teacher Marion Mayer. They introduce media literacy education to teach



about popular film. Using two standards-based examples, their main argument is that media literacy education can be used to develop students' critical literary faculties, demonstrating how standards can be made to work *for* students.

Chapter 14, titled 'Teaching from the Test: Using High-stakes Assessments to Enhance Student Learning', is written by co-editor Julie A. Gorlewski of D'Youville College in Buffalo, New York. From her starting point on the importance of choosing a preposition, that is, the simple change of *to* to *from* in the chapter's title, Gorlewski shows how high-stakes tests can be used to expand the curriculum and enhance student learning in a teacher education program. She concludes the chapter by observing: 'Reconsidering our own perceptions of standards as something we can use with and for our students (rather than on and against them) enables educators to avoid having our profession devoured by high-stakes assessments' (p. 235).

Chapter 15 is written by co-editor David A. Gorlewski, also of Buffalo's D'Youville College. He focuses on how accreditation mandates can be prevented from being used to standardize course content, despite such having been the outcome for objectives and assessments. Using critical theory in a graduate educational setting, Gorlewski argues: 'Educators have the power to apply the principles of critical theory to enable students to become more engaged in their own learning and to help them gain a deeper understanding of the knowledge, concepts, and skills that they, as future teachers, will be charged with teaching' (p. 249).

The sixteenth and final chapter, co-written by Lauren P. Hoffman of Lewis University, Illinois and Brad J. Porfilio, the third co-editor of the volume, briefly introduces a social-science framework using, among others, Henry A. Giroux's work to throw light on the U.S. national teacher accreditation process. Hoffmann and Porfilio argue that this process can provide fertile ground for transforming a conservative and commercialized college of education. They also note the importance of knowing who or which entities are responsible for any educational accountability regime. Finally, they draw



attention to the dangers of commercializing education and the forces promoting and facilitating such a development.

In sum the book is both reassuring and invigorating because it demonstrates that there is an alternative to the contemporary neoliberal mindset permeating education policies and practices and because the fiery souls of the contributors are highly contagious. The book is commendable because it sounds alarm bells about the expansion of neoliberal policies in education while it also transcends the neoliberal hegemony by calling for reflection upon how education systems are organized. To that end the many empirical and very concrete action plans presented in the book are immensely valuable.

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Christian Ydesen is an Assistant Professor at Aalborg University, Denmark, in the Department of Learning and Philosophy. His research interests are high-stakes testing, educational accountability, history of education, comparative education and intercultural education. He has published the book *The Rise of High-Stakes Testing in Denmark, 1920-1970* and numerous articles on subjects of educational testing and accountability in historical and comparative perspectives.



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